



**Denise W. Merrill  
Secretary of the State  
Connecticut**

# Election Performance Report 2012





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## Executive Summary

On July 20, 2011, Secretary of the State of Connecticut Denise W. Merrill convened the first meeting of her Election Performance Task Force. Members of the task force included state and local elections officials, representatives of municipal government, voting advocates, and academics. The task force examined Connecticut's current electoral system with the goals of identifying measures to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the voting process; maintaining its security and integrity; providing future direction for Connecticut's electoral process; evaluating ways to integrate technology into our system; and finding ways to increase voter participation, particularly among underperforming groups.

The task force hosted nationally recognized guest speakers on subjects including the national perspective, election performance measurement, data collection, online voter registration, and Election Day registration. Members formed three subcommittees to further explore the issues of improving voters' experience, improving voter participation among underperforming groups, and improving post-election and year-round election administration processes.

Contained in this report are the findings of the Election Performance Task Force, organized by subcommittee subject matter, with the additional category of voting technology. The Secretary utilized these findings along with feedback from members of the task force, other interested parties, and the public to shape the recommendations that are detailed at the end of this report.

The Voters' Experience: This section explores the voting experience of the general public. Anecdotally, members of this subcommittee felt that the overall voting experience in Connecticut is a positive one. However, as is true in election administration nationwide, more information is needed to assess whether actual data bears out anecdotal evidence. The absentee ballot process in Connecticut is overly cumbersome and overly exclusive. Though voters' confidence in the system should always be a concern, empirical evidence shows that fraud by people voting in person is extremely rare.

Improving Voter Participation: The members of this subcommittee were not only interested in improving overall voter participation, but particularly participation among underperforming groups including youth, minorities, people with disabilities, and overseas and military voters. Election Day registration has had a positive effect on overall turnout in states that have enacted it. Early voting has become more popular, particularly with minority voters. While society has become more mobile, this is especially true among youths and minorities. Efforts need to continue to make voting more accessible to voters with disabilities and military and overseas voters.

Post-Election & Year-Round Election Administration: This section explores issues that arise in day-to-day election administration. More information is needed regarding local election funding in Connecticut, but some cost savings can be achieved by regionalization and centralization of certain services. Connecticut's voter registration system could be strengthened through automation and data sharing. The political nature of Connecticut's election administration system underscores the need for accountability and standardization of election procedures across the state.

Election Technology: This section highlights the products that were featured at the August 31 technology fair and provides guidelines for consideration of new technology by Connecticut election officials. The Secretary is examining ways to streamline systems like the absentee ballot process through the use of



technology. Further exploration of new technologies is needed, and an effort should be made to ensure that existing technologies are being fully accessed and utilized by all election administrators in our state.

The Secretary's recommendations are organized according to task force goals. There are several recommendations on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the voting process, including amending the Connecticut Constitution to remove strict absentee ballot limitations, creating a Connecticut Democracy Index, and the development of a certification process for Registrars of Voters. To maintain the security and integrity of the election process, the Secretary's recommendations include the development of a secure online voter registration process, greater emphasis on ballot security, and the use of other statewide databases to further verify the voter registration database.

When it comes to integrating technology into our election system, the Secretary is ready to lead the way with the implementation of a statewide, web-based electronic reporting system for election results. She recommends pilot programs such as those that occurred this November in Torrington, Simsbury and Vernon with electronic poll books. She is particularly interested in ways that new technology can be utilized in conjunction with voting for people with disabilities. The Secretary is especially concerned with increasing voter participation in Connecticut. Her recommendations in this area include Election Day registration, further study of early voting, voter registration that follows the person within Connecticut, better access to voting for people with disabilities, making electronic transmission of ballots to overseas and military voters the norm in Connecticut, and making Election Day a holiday.

The Secretary believes these recommendations will build on Connecticut's strengths and make our state's elections more effective, efficient and secure while improving voter turnout.



*Secretary of the State Election Performance Task Force October 31 Meeting, courtesy of the Connecticut Network*



## The Voters' Experience

In September 2011, a subcommittee of the Election Performance Task Force met to discuss Connecticut voters' experience and ways to improve it. Most people around the table initially believed from their personal experience that our state's elections generally run smoothly except for a few highly publicized incidents. However, the subcommittee members agreed that they could not be sure if this is true because the data does not exist to prove whether these isolated incidents are glitches or indicative of underlying problems in the system. The subcommittee recommended implementing a simple exit survey for voters at the polls. It could include a few questions such as: How long did you wait in line to vote? Were you treated courteously? Was it easy to find your polling place? Was it clean and accessible?

Another major concern of the subcommittee was the inconsistency of services provided and in implementation of election policy among towns. Some towns, for instance, insist that a voter show photo identification at the polls, while others do not. Some Registrars of Voters are full time, some work only a few hours a week, and some are only available by appointment. The subcommittee felt strongly that best practices should be developed around issues such as staffing of the Registrars' offices, voter registration, maintaining voter lists, ordering ballots, preparing for emergencies, maintaining the security of machines and ballots, outreach, post-election audits, staffing polls and training of poll workers. Registrars of Voters should also undergo uniform training and a certification process. The Secretary of the State in conjunction with the State Elections Enforcement Commission could take the lead in this process.

One task force member, Richard Bieder, also served on the Bridgeport Mayor's Election Advisory Panel. The panel examined the problems that arose in Bridgeport's November 2010 election. The panel made several valuable recommendations worth consideration. One recommendation in particular stands out as a common-sense way to avoid voter confusion on Election Day. In some towns, polling locations differ for local or district elections versus state elections. Different polling places for different elections is a recipe for voters showing up at the wrong place on Election Day. Therefore, polling locations should be the same for district/local elections as they are for state elections. This can be accomplished by utilizing a single location for multiple district elections when necessary.

Currently, regulatory guidelines for the placement of privacy booths for voting state that when possible, they should be at least three feet from any wall, partition or guardrail and at least four feet from the checkers' table (Secretary of the State Regulations Sec. 9-242a-11). This has been interpreted to mean that each individual privacy booth must be at least 3 feet from another privacy booth. The lever voting machine was the origin of the stipulation about distance between booths. Several members of the group felt that this regulation should be revisited in light of new technologies. For example, a handicap-accessible privacy booth that was on display at the technology fair combined four privacy stations into one structure. The structure allowed privacy at each station and also allowed for voters with disabilities to access one of the four stations. This would help to create a more uniform voting experience for voters with disabilities. However, the current regulation on placement of privacy booths for voting led to confusion over whether this setup would be allowed. Further clarification and/or an update of this regulation are necessary.

Finally, subcommittee members were concerned with voter roll-off. Voter roll-off happens when there are multiple offices up for election and/or there are multiple referenda listed on the ballot. Roll-off can be calculated by measuring the difference between the number of votes cast for the top office on a ballot



versus the number of votes cast for offices and/or questions at the bottom of the ballot. The longer the ballot, the more likely roll-off is to occur. The effects of roll-off in Connecticut should be further studied. Perhaps ballot setup standards could be established that would limit voter roll-off.

### A Connecticut Democracy Index

Heather Gerken, professor of law at Yale Law School and a member of the Election Performance Task Force, wrote the book *The Democracy Index*, published in 2009. Election administration is “a world without data”<sup>1</sup> and the Democracy Index aims to change that. By collecting basic, common-sense data points from each state, a Democracy Index would allow citizens to compare how their state is performing against the other 49 states. This data can be used to identify trends, to inform electoral decision-making going forward, and to highlight successes and identify isolated incidents versus trends. Professor Gerken’s book highlights numerous instances in which data-driven management helped election administrators identify better, more affordable and more efficient strategies for running their election systems



*Secretary of the State Election Performance Task Force September 19th Meeting, courtesy of the Connecticut Network*

Professor Gerken utilized a 2007 survey that was conducted by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission to rank the states based on the amount of information each state reported. At that time, Connecticut was ranked 45 out of 50. Professor Gerken added the caveat that our state is not

alone—most states did “a relentlessly terrible job”<sup>2</sup> of reporting their data. Data is collected in the private sector and in other areas of government as routine practice. Fortune 500 companies constantly compare their data to each other for performance information. CitiStat is one of the most well-known programs in government that utilizes data-driven analysis. It was first used in Baltimore in 1999 as a way to track response time for pothole repair and other local government services.

Data-driven management is a crucial tool for managing and improving our election system. Yet data collection and utilization are not routine practice in U.S. election administration. The Secretary proposes the creation of a Connecticut Democracy Index (CDI), which would collect data from each municipality. This would tremendously expand existing data on our state’s electoral process, and would also allow for benchmarking across municipalities and with other states. The CDI may track information such as:

- Voter registration rates
- Voter turnout rates

1 Heather K. Gerken, *Democracy Index* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) p. 9.

2 Heather K. Gerken, Election Performance Task Force Meeting, Hartford, CT, 19 September 2011.

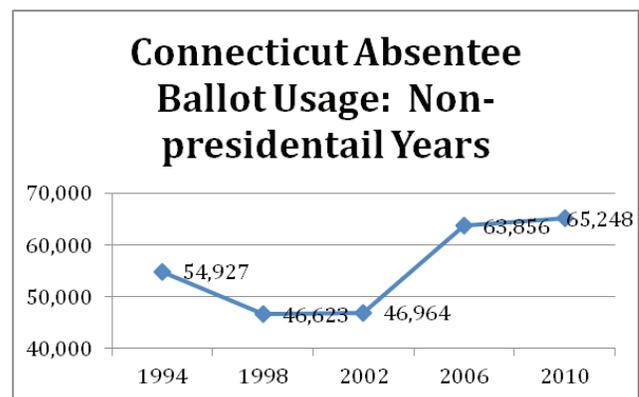
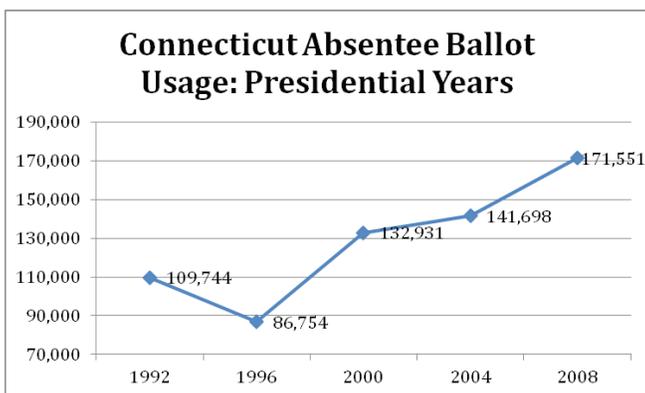


- How long voters wait in line
- How long it takes a voter to cast a ballot
- How many provisional ballots are cast and why
- How long it takes a new voter registration to move through the system
- How many ballots are discarded and why
- How often voting machines break down and duration of the breakdown
- How many voters were turned away from the polls and why
- Number and types of complaints reported on the statewide hotline

*“We don’t know how many people cast a ballot in the last two presidential races . . . We don’t know how long voters stood in line . . . We don’t know how many poll workers showed up on Election Day. We don’t know what percentage of voting machines broke down on Election Day.”* Professor Heather Gerken at the Election Performance Task Force in Hartford, September 19, 2011.

The Secretary of the State will partner with Professor Gerken to develop the CDI. A working group will consist of Registrars of Voters, Town Clerks, Moderators, members of the Secretary’s staff, representatives of advocacy and community groups, data collection experts and political scientists. The initial focus of the group will be to produce in the near term high quality data that is comparable across jurisdictions, rather than focusing on the quantity of data. The group will also examine what kind of data it would like to collect in the future, as well as plan for the structure needed to produce, aggregate and analyze the data it collects.

Absentee Ballots in Connecticut



Military and overseas voters,<sup>3</sup> along with many voters with disabilities, utilize absentee ballots in order to cast their votes in our state. Connecticut’s absentee ballot process is onerous and confusing to the voters who try to use it and to advocates who work to increase voter turnout with these groups. There is no

<sup>3</sup> Overseas voters differ from out of country voters in that overseas voters are allowed to vote for federal offices only and are not registered voters. They are often ex-patriots who last lived in town before moving from the U.S. Overseas ballots are only used in federal elections. Out of the country voters are temporarily living or residing outside of the U.S. with the intent of returning and are registered voters.



question that the time-consuming nature of the process in particular inconveniences military and overseas voters.

North Branford Town Clerk Lisa Valenti and Bristol Town Clerk Therese Pac were asked to lay out the entire process step by step and follow up with their recommendations to streamline the system at the October 19, 2011 meeting of the Election Performance Task Force. This may have been the first time the Connecticut absentee ballot process in its current form was ever explained in full to a state government panel.

The absentee ballot process in Connecticut is largely paper based. There are multiple application forms depending on whether you are a civilian, a military service member or a resident living temporarily

*Discarded/spoiled ballots differ from rejected ballots: Discarded/spoiled ballots occur at the polls when a person has made an error. The voter has the option to obtain a new ballot and vote again. A rejected ballot is an absentee ballot that is not counted because election law has been breached: The inner envelope is not signed, two ballots are placed in one inner envelope (often spouses' ballots), the inner envelope is not enclosed, etc. In the case of rejected ballots, votes are lost and not re-voted, causing disenfranchisement. In a survey of Connecticut Town and City Clerks recently conducted by the Connecticut Town Clerks Association, it was found that 3% of absentee ballots are rejected.*

overseas; if you are applying for an additional ballot; or if you are applying for an emergency ballot. There is a special application for referenda for which there is less than three weeks notice, and there are several other special applications for specific purposes. All applications must be numbered and the town name must be filled in on each. A log must be kept of all absentee ballot applications. Another log must be kept by anyone distributing five or more absentee ballot applications. There are several different types of absentee ballots as well, and specific rules governing the handling of ballots distributed and received.

The application process could be reduced to a single form. Processes such as numbering and logging applications could be automated through the Centralized Voter Registration System. Technology can be used to shorten the time applications and ballots are in the postal system.

Beyond these initial recommendations, the task force felt that more time should be devoted to this subject. The current process has been developed over decades, often in an effort to reduce fraud. The result is a cumbersome, time-consuming, multi-layered and inconvenient system. It is ripe for a top-to-bottom, detailed reexamination and would

surely benefit from automation and streamlining. A working group could be convened consisting of Town Clerks, representatives of the Secretary of the State, representatives of the State Elections Enforcement Commission, and other key stakeholders. The group could examine issues such as the absentee ballot timeline and absentee ballot counting procedures on Election Night, as well as how the deadlines for changes to the ballot work with or against absentee ballot deadlines.

Some are concerned that changes to the system might result in fraudulent voting. However, some changes can help to reduce fraud. Technology can be used to capture voters' digital signatures, which can then be visually checked against absentee ballot application signatures and the voter's signature on absentee ballot envelopes. Town Clerks and Registrars of Voters can undergo signature verification training as a mechanism for fraud prevention. Finally, any fraud prevention measures should be weighed against the



possibility of voter disenfranchisement.

### Amending Connecticut's Constitution

The Connecticut Constitution outlines the democratic principles of state government. Article 6 contains provisions on the qualifications of electors. Article 6, Sec. 7 determines who is eligible to vote by means of an absentee ballot. Article 6, Sec. 8 gives the authority of regulating absentee voting to the General Assembly.

Article 6, Sec. 7 of the Connecticut Constitution raises concern because it restricts absentee voting to three classes. The section provides:

The general assembly may provide by law for voting in the choice of any officer to be elected or upon any question to be voted on at an election by qualified voters of the state *who are unable to appear at the polling place on the day of election because of absence from the city or town of which they are inhabitants or because of sickness or physical disability or because the tenets of their religion forbid secular activity.* (C.G.S.A. Const. Art. 6, Sec. 7) (Emphasis added.)

Therefore, only three classes of voters are able to vote as absentee voters: Those who are unable to appear at the polling place because of 1) absence from the city or town in which they are registered to vote or 2) physical illness or disability or 3) are under a religious obligation forbidding such activity.

Connecticut provides some of the most severe restrictions on absentee voting among the states. While every state provides for election and voting practices in its constitution, not all choose to address absentee voting. Only 17 states specifically address absentee voting in their constitutions, and of those, only eleven place restrictions on absentee voting through their constitutions. Twenty-nine states allow no excuse absentee voting. Anecdotally, the current absentee voting system is not working properly. Some voters indicate they have submitted absentee ballots when they spent some portion of Election Day in their town. There are no exceptions to the constitutional limitations on absentee voting, and misrepresentation of absentee voter eligibility is a Class D felony in Connecticut.<sup>4</sup>

*On October 29, 2011, a rare autumn snowstorm hit Connecticut. A combination of heavy snow on top of trees still covered with leaves resulted in massive property damage and downed lines across the state. Over 750,000 residents found themselves without power in freezing temperatures. Those whose homes or streets were not blocked by downed trees and branches made their way to local shelters, homes of friends and family who had power, or to hotels both in and out of state. Emergency response workers found themselves working 16-hour shifts as the state tried to dig out of the storm. On Election Day, November 8, many towns remained without power and emergency response workers continued to work long shifts to get the state back on track. Because of Connecticut's strict absentee voting requirements, many affected citizens were not able to cast absentee ballots and therefore had to forfeit their right to participate in the election.*

<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the General Statutes allow some forms of absentee balloting that are not permitted by the State Constitution.



Complications of our modern lifestyle make it hard for many voters to access the polls between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. on only one single day. It is rare for someone to work close enough to their polling location to easily vote during the work day. When commuting time is added to a typical eight-hour work day, it could easily be lengthened to ten. Add in time to get children ready for school or daycare, dropping them off and picking them up from school, child care or activities, time for meals, homework help and putting children to bed and the average working parent's busy day lasts well beyond the fourteen hours that the polls are open. Those who work in New York City, Providence or Boston also face time constraints and unpredictable commuting times.

The Secretary has sought to correct this by proposing an amendment to the State Constitution. The proposed amendment, House Joint Resolution Number 88 of the 2011 session of the Connecticut General Assembly, would remove restrictive language regarding absentee voting from the Constitution. The same language that restricts absentee voting, along with other provisions, prevents legislation allowing for early in-person voting. The amendment would put decisions regarding restrictions on absentee and early voting in the hands of the legislature, where it rightly belongs.

***“All the hours of voting”***: Connecticut’s constitution does not specify whether a voter must be out of town for the entire 24 hours of Election Day, just for the hours that the polls are open, or even for just some of the hours that the polls are open. It merely states that an absence from town must occur. In 1934 the Attorney General issued an opinion stating that the voter must be absent from the state for the entire election day (18 Op. Atty. Gen. 313, Oct. 26, 1934). Section 9-135(a) of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that voters who are unable to appear at their polling place be unable to do so “during all the hours of voting,” and this is the standard that is currently in use.

### Voter Convenience & Voter Confidence

Bilal Sekou, professor of political science at the University of Hartford, referred to electoral fraud as the 800 pound gorilla in the room whenever changes to the voting system are raised. Indeed, the issue was raised by members of the task force when discussing things like absentee ballots and early voting, online voter registration and Election Day registration. However, empirical evidence regarding in-person voter fraud does not bear out these concerns.

Steven Carbó, Senior Program Director of the Democracy Program at Demos, said that there is a wealth of information disproving the existence of widespread voter fraud.<sup>5</sup> Charles Stewart, co-director of the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, found that people whose candidates win tend to be more confident in the system, whereas those whose candidates lose are more likely to suspect fraud.<sup>6</sup> Experts

5 Steven Carbó. “Testimony of Steven Carbó,” Hearing of the Hawaii House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary, [http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Demos\\_testimonyHB%20\\_343\\_Feb\\_10\\_2011.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Demos_testimonyHB%20_343_Feb_10_2011.pdf) (10 February 2011).

6 Charles Stewart III, “Get a Grip on Elections,” Los Angeles Times, 27 October 2008.



point out that the risks associated with individual voter fraud far outweigh the benefit: In Connecticut, for instance, a single instance of voter registration fraud or of fraudulent voting is punishable by a fine of up to \$5000 and up to five years in prison. The potential cost for a single vote is not worth the risk to the average person. To the extent that fraud has been uncovered, it usually involves absentee balloting, not in-person voting.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence has shown that even though in-person voter fraud does happen, the frequency is so microscopic (between .0009% and .0004%) that Americans are struck and killed by lightning about as often. While reasonable steps should be taken to prevent voter fraud and ensure confidence in the electoral process, any fraud prevention policies should be weighed against the potential for disenfranchisement of eligible voters. For instance, requirements to show photo identification in order to vote can disenfranchise up to 10% of eligible voters.<sup>8</sup>

There is anecdotal evidence that voters who utilize absentee ballots receive more attention from campaigns—some voters even go so far as to call the unwanted attention harassment. It was the feeling of some task force members that this is the result of the way that absentee voter lists are handled in Connecticut. Campaigns can get lists from each town of those who have taken out applications for absentee ballots, those who have received absentee ballots, and those who have returned absentee ballots. These lists are updated on an ongoing basis and are available to the public anywhere from daily to weekly depending on the town.

Some absentee voters have safety concerns about their information being available to the public. Voters who may be out of town on vacation or in the hospital due to illness are afraid that unscrupulous people may take advantage of the information that the voter's home may be vacant. Absentee voters—particularly the elderly—report frequent calls from campaigns asking if they have returned their ballots yet. Some callers will say, “We didn't get your ballot back yet.”<sup>9</sup> A confused voter who sent back her ballot days ago will call the Town Clerk to find out what happened to her ballot. Many times, the office has already logged receipt of the voter's ballot but the campaign staffer who called the voter was working off a list that had not been updated. Adding further to voter confusion, some voters believe the caller is a member of the Town Clerk's office when in fact it is usually a campaign staffer or volunteer.

In cases like these, safety and privacy concerns of absentee voters must be balanced with the public's right to government information. A voter who casts his ballot in person is not subject to such scrutiny as the absentee voter; why should an absentee voter be subject to more public scrutiny than an in-person voter? On the other hand, freedom of information laws ensure public access to the records of state and municipal government in Connecticut. The differing needs of voter privacy and the public's right to information should be further explored to see if a better balance between the two can be struck.

*“Thousands of hours of analysis by dispassionate researchers have uncovered virtually no election fraud, even though the voter lists are flawed. And even though the machines sometimes break down, there is no demonstrated case of an electronic voting machine being maliciously hacked in any American election.”*— Charles Stewart III, “Get a Grip on Elections.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 2008.

7 There are some instances of unlawful use of absentee ballots that are not always classified as fraud.

8 “The Truth About Voter Fraud,” *Brennan Center for Justice*, [http://www.brennancenter.org/page/-/d/download\\_file\\_38347.pdf](http://www.brennancenter.org/page/-/d/download_file_38347.pdf), September 2006.

9 Telephone Conversation with Therese Pac, Bristol Town Clerk, 12 December 2011.



## Voter Participation

One subcommittee of the Election Performance Task Force met on improving voter participation, with a particular focus on underperforming groups such as youth, minorities, people with disabilities and overseas and military voters. The group noted that while youth typically have low turnout at the polls, the 2008 presidential election saw a significant spike in the youth vote. This was thought to be due in part to candidates' successful use of social media to connect with these voters. Collecting information on racial and ethnic performance is particularly challenging in Connecticut because our voter registration cards do not ask for this. However, exit polls can provide some of this information.

The group agreed that voting machines should be brought into the schools for use in mock elections or student council elections so students can become familiar with them before they reach 18 and go to the polls on their own. The group also felt that there should be an increase in voter education, civics education, and funding of voter outreach. There was discussion about voter registration moving with people when they move within Connecticut. Other ideas included expanding voter registration opportunities in public assistance offices; voter registration efforts aimed specifically at those in the criminal justice system coupled with an effort to restore voting rights to those on parole; the establishment of Election Day as a holiday; and the posting of sample ballots on Registrars of Voters' web pages prior to each election.

The subcommittee recognized the need get information directly from the populations being discussed. It recommended the use of focus groups in the following areas: African Americans; Latinos; youth (both college and high school age); new immigrants; and people with disabilities.

### Connecticut's Civic Health

In order to fully understand voter participation in Connecticut, the concept of civic health in our state should be explored. Important elements of civic health include civic engagement, political participation, social connectedness, access to information, and equity. Efforts to improve voter participation can be structured around our knowledge of how well Connecticut measures on these civic health indicators. In October 2011, the Secretary of the State, in conjunction with national and local civics advocates, released a report on Connecticut's civic health. The report discussed the existence of two Connecticut. Bridging the gap between these two worlds is vital to creating a state that facilitates the voters' experience and fosters maximum voter participation.

Only 14.6% of Connecticut residents exchange favors with neighbors frequently, placing the state 32<sup>nd</sup> in the nation. The statistic is troublesome because when people are connected personally, they are more likely to come together for civic or political reasons.<sup>10</sup> Volunteerism, charitable giving, and group participation are factors in civic health as well. People with some college experience are more than twice as likely to volunteer and are two to three times more likely to participate in groups.<sup>11</sup> Education greatly affects civic health, highlighting the need for efforts to encourage and improve education.

During her tenure as a legislator, Secretary Merrill fought to pass a law mandating the teaching of civics in

10 Valeriano Ramos Jr. and Nancy Thomas, "2011 Connecticut Civic Health Index," p. 8.

11 Ibid, p. 10.



high schools. Elementary schools are also required to include a program on democracy in the third, fourth or fifth grade curriculum. These mandates are essential because the more informed citizens are, the more likely they are not only to vote but to become active members in civic and political life.

Gender, geographic location and ethnicity and race affected the amount of charitable giving and group participation in Connecticut. According to 2010 survey data, Connecticut ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 36.9% of residents belonging to or participating in an organization in their community. As of the same year, Connecticut ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in charitable giving.<sup>12</sup>

Political participation is an important element of civic health that can be improved in Connecticut. Voting rates have been increasing over the past three presidential elections yet voting in municipal elections has shown a gradual decline. Only 13.7% of Connecticut residents reach out to public officials, and 10.8% attend public meetings.<sup>13</sup> These statistics directly correlate with income levels and race and ethnicity. Studies indicate that informed citizens are more likely to participate in public life. Fortunately, Connecticut residents have great access to information on local, national and world events. 28.3% of Connecticut residents discussed politics frequently.<sup>14</sup> Yet this percentage can be improved by ensuring that the state's information resources reach youth and minorities.

The key to improving civic health seems to be eliminating the gap between the two Connecticuts so that all citizens, despite their age, race, income level, or location, have an equal opportunity to become educated in civics and therefore have a greater chance of participating in political life in the future.

### Election Day Registration

Voter registration requirements did not always exist in the United States. They first appeared in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a method of ensuring that foreign-born non-citizens could not vote. They became widespread in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a method for disenfranchising African Americans, who had only just been granted suffrage. While the Jim Crow laws of that time period have long since been repealed, early deadlines associated with voter registration continue to disenfranchise millions of otherwise-eligible voters and cause strife between would-be voters and poll workers across the nation. Election Day Registration (EDR) is one way to resolve these issues while increasing statewide voter turnout.

In the 2008 presidential election, states with EDR reported a 7% higher turnout than those without EDR. Between 1980 and 2004, the average turnout for presidential elections was between 10 and 12% higher for those states with EDR. It is estimated that over one million Americans used EDR to vote in the 2008 election.<sup>15</sup> Those who benefit most from EDR include populations with higher mobility. Between 2007 and 2008, 11.7% of all voting age individuals moved. The young, minorities and low-income populations make up significant portions of this number<sup>16</sup> and therefore would particularly benefit from EDR.

<sup>12</sup> Valeriano Ramos Jr. and Nancy Thomas, "2011 Connecticut Civic Health Index," p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> "Voters Win with Election Day Registration," *A Demos Policy Brief*, January 2010, [http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotersWinSDR\\_2010\\_Demos.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotersWinSDR_2010_Demos.pdf) (19 November 2011).

<sup>16</sup> "Demos Fact Sheet: Same Day Registration," [http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/EDR\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/EDR_factsheet.pdf), (19 November 2011).



EDR was first adopted by a handful of states in the early and mid-1970's, culminating in a failed effort by President Jimmy Carter to nationalize it. It did not gain national attention again until the passage of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) in 1993. Congressional Republican leaders included an exemption to the NVRA for states that quickly enacted EDR. At this time, three more states enacted EDR to take advantage of the exemption. In the 2000 presidential election, up to three million Americans were turned away from the polls because of voter registration problems.<sup>17</sup> The increased scrutiny over voter registration requirements resulted in another resurgence of interest in EDR. Currently, eight states and the District of Columbia offer Election Day Registration and the policy is again being considered at the national level.

The Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation enacting EDR in its 2003 session but Governor John Rowland vetoed the bill, citing concerns about voter fraud.<sup>18</sup> However, studies have shown that this concern is misplaced. In fact, EDR may actually deter fraud for several reasons. It is conducted in person with election officials as witnesses; those registering on Election Day are required to submit proof of their identity and residence; and often states that adopt EDR also adopt list maintenance procedures that include additional identity verification for those voters who utilize EDR.<sup>19</sup>

***Percent of eligible citizens who cast a vote:  
2008 Presidential Election***  
*Average in EDR states = 69%*  
*Average in other states = 62%*  
*Connecticut = 66%*

In 1973, Maine became one of the first states to enact Election Day Registration. Since it became law, that state has had one of the highest voter participation rates in the nation. In 2010, Maine tied Minnesota (also an EDR state) for highest voter participation rate.<sup>20</sup> Election Day Registration was in use for 38 years before the 2011 session of Maine's state legislature abolished it with the passage of LD 1376. While the governor signed the bill into law, advocates organized across the state to use Maine's people's veto—that state's method of voter repeal of a law. The effort involved getting about 70,000 Maine residents' signatures on a petition in less than a month, over 13,000 more signatures than required. The people's veto passed in the November 2011 election by a margin of 3 to 2 and the will of the people succeeded in restoring Election Day Registration in Maine.

### Election Day as a Holiday

One way to create greater convenience for Connecticut voters to reach the polls would be to declare

<sup>17</sup> Steven Carbo and Brenda Wright, "The Promise and Practice of Election Day Registration Excerpted from Voting Rights," American Bar Association, Benjamin E Groffith ed. (2008).

<sup>18</sup> The Connecticut House of Representatives passed a version of Election Day Registration again in 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Steven Carbo and Brenda Wright, "The Promise and Practice of Election Day Registration Excerpted from Voting Rights," American Bar Association, Benjamin E Groffith ed. (2008).

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Michael McDonald, "2010 General Election Turnout Rates," United States Elections Project, 28 December 2011 [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2010G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html).



Election Day a holiday. The states of Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, and West Virginia have made Election Day a statewide holiday.<sup>21</sup> Nationwide about 31% of all employers give paid time off on Election Day for employees, while 26% allow unpaid time off for employees to vote.<sup>22</sup> With a combination of EDR and time off for citizens to vote, voter turnout in some states has been in the 70% range, compared to Connecticut's 66% in the last presidential election.<sup>23</sup> If the state government makes a stronger effort towards accessibility for Connecticut citizens to vote, statistics show voters will turn out in higher numbers.

Another option would be to extend voting to the weekend, when people frequently have more free time to go to the voting booth. In many nations, Election Day is declared a national holiday and frequently is held on Sundays to make voter turnout higher. Over thirty nations hold their elections on either Saturday or Sunday for greater convenience to the public. Other nations and transnational organizations hold their elections over the course a few days, even weeks. India held its most recent national election every Tuesday and Wednesday for four weeks to account for its vast population across both rural and urban spaces.<sup>24</sup> European Union parliament elections are held across a four day period, from Thursday until Sunday, giving European Union citizens ample time to go to the polls for elections.<sup>25</sup> Of the top ten developed nations with the highest turnout of registered voters, eight have a national Election Day holiday.<sup>26</sup>

Some members of the task force raised concern over holding elections on weekend days, fearing that this would conflict with religious observances, since many religions consider Sundays or Saturdays to be days of worship. This could be overcome by holding elections on multiple days, so as not to exclude particular religions. Some members of the business community may be concerned that creating a statewide holiday would cause an undue burden on the state's businesses. If Election Day were declared a national holiday, the effect on Connecticut businesses would be mitigated. Still, either the declaration of a national Election Day holiday or the incorporation of weekend days for voting would result in greater access to the polls for voters.

### Connecticut's Citizens' Election Program

Connecticut has distinguished itself from other states in the country by instituting a successful public-financing system. This Citizens' Election Program (CEP) promotes not only fair elections, but will consequently improve the state's civic health and promote engagement and participation in our government. With dismal voter turnout in some of the cities and towns within the state, the CEP requires more involvement from constituents, leading to more contested races and an increased interest in elections. The CEP also makes running for office more attainable for historically underrepresented

21 "Holiday ID US/Election-Day," Time and Date, <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/election-day>, 20 January 2012.

22 Eve Tahmincioglu, "Should Election Day be a National Holiday?" MSNBC, 4 November 2008. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27365018/ns/business-careers/t/should-election-day-be-national-holiday/>.

23 Dr. Michael McDonald, "2008 General Election Turnout Rates" United States Election Project, 28 December 2011. [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2008G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html).

24 Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, "India's 2009 Elections: The Resilience of Regionalism and Ethnicity," South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal 3, 2009.

25 "European Elections 2009 – Briefing," EUBusiness, <http://www.eubusiness.com/topics/institutions/euro-elections-09>, 14 May 2009.

26 Cal Jillson, "American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change" London: Taylor & Francis. p. 199, 2009.



groups who may not themselves be wealthy or have regular contact with well-off donors including younger candidates, women and minorities.

Although direct business contributions to candidates were never allowed, companies were permitted to purchase advertisements in programs for political events, commonly referred to as ad books. There was no limit to the number of political action committees (PACs) each lawmaker could control, and no limit to the size of the contribution that could be made by a PAC consisting of “two or more individuals.” Good government advocates and legislative reformers felt that these special-interest dollars exerted undue and disproportionate influence over legislative votes and priorities.<sup>27</sup> Under the CEP, ad books have been completely eliminated and PACs have been significantly restricted. Contributions to political campaigns from state contractors are forbidden, and there is a one hundred dollar limit on contributions to publicly financed candidates from individuals and lobbyists in all races. In order to receive public funds, candidates must raise contributions in small amounts from many individual donors. Additionally, there is a cap on how much money can be donated from out of state and a floor on how many donations must be collected from citizens within a candidate’s own district. Campaign spending is limited to the amount of the qualifying contributions and the grant.

*Number of primary challenges  
in the Connecticut General Assembly  
before the enactment of the CEP in 2006:*

**12**

*Number of primary challenges  
in the Connecticut General Assembly  
after the enactment of the CEP in 2008:*

**22**

Connecticut candidates have been eager participants in the Citizens’ Election Program since its inception. 75 percent of state candidates relied on public funding in 2008 and 2010. State funding is six times larger than what is provided in Maine and nearly 20 times greater than what is offered in Arizona.<sup>28</sup> As more local community members are asked to make small campaign donations, they become more involved and invested in political candidates. As of right now, only 14.3% of Connecticut residents support a party or candidate,<sup>29</sup> but as the program increases local interest in elections, this number can only increase.

The lack of contested elections has been cited as a contributing factor to the public’s disinterest in voting. In 1996, 41 Connecticut General Assembly candidates ran unopposed. In both 2000 and 2004 at least one of the major parties failed to field a candidate in nearly 40% of Connecticut’s legislative races. Residents are not motivated to vote in uncontested elections. By 2010, only 29% of Connecticut’s legislative races (or 30 legislative seats) did not have a candidate from both major parties.<sup>30</sup> Primary challenges have also increased under the CEP. The success of this program opens the door for increased civic engagement and political involvement.

## Youth

Young people traditionally turn out to vote at a lower rate than older generations, though information

<sup>27</sup> Keith M. Phaneuf. “The Clean-Election State,” *The American Prospect*, 2010 5 January <http://prospect.org/article/clean-election-state>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit., Valeriano Ramos Jr. and Nancy Thomas, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit., Phaneuf.



from recent elections shows an increase in this demographic's turnout. In 2004, 4.3 million more voters age 18-29 went to the polls than in 2000. In 2006, turnout grew by almost 2 million when compared to the 2002 election. This age group represents more than one fifth of the electorate. It is also more diverse than the rest of the electorate, with 17% identifying as Hispanic, 15% as Black and 4% as Asian.<sup>31</sup> In 2008, there were 6.5 million more voters in this age group than in 2004. Still, there is work to be done. While youths represent 21% of the population, they only represented 17% of voters in 2008.<sup>32</sup>

Rock the Vote's 2011 Voting System Scorecard ranked the states' policies as they relate to young people in the areas of registration, voting, and voter preparation. It is important to note that this scorecard did not rank how well Connecticut administers the current system; rather, it is a ranking of states according to the policies that Rock the Vote feels would benefit young voters. Connecticut was ranked 48 out of 50 with a total score of 4.2 out of a possible 21, or 20%. The state's lowest score, 0, was received in the voter preparation section. One half of this score could be improved by mandating the testing of civics in high school. While Connecticut law requires students to take 1/2 credit in civics and American government, testing of civics knowledge is not mandated, nor is there a standardized curriculum for the subject. The other way to improve the preparation score is to enact pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds.<sup>33</sup>

*Facebook is the most prominent on-line social network for young adults in the United States. Nearly 21 million adult Americans have Facebook accounts to date, of which 18 million are ages 18 to 29, and one-half of all Facebook users visit the site on a daily basis. –Rock the Vote, June 2008.*

The second-lowest score, 1, was received in the registration section. According to Rock the Vote, the only pro-youth Connecticut voter registration policy is that third parties can hold registration drives. To improve its score in this section, the state would need to enact automatic, permanent and portable, online and same day registration. Some of these policy options are discussed in more detail in other areas of the findings of this report.

Michael P. McDonald defined portable voter registration as “permitting registrants who move anywhere within a state to transfer their registration and vote on Election Day at their new polling place.”<sup>34</sup> The definition has been expanded to include not only Election Day registration but also automatic transfer of registration when a voter makes a change of address with the Department of Motor Vehicles or the U.S. Postal Service. The task force agreed that Connecticut should achieve some form of portable voter registration to increase participation among voters with higher mobility. Young people in particular tend to fall into this category, given their likelihood to move due to transferring schools, new jobs, or military service.

Technology is useful in reaching out to all voters but has proven particularly so with young people, among whom utilization of the Internet and mobile messaging often occurs on a daily basis. One study found that text messages sent to young voters in the 2008 presidential primary season increased turnout by

31 “Winning Young Voters: New Media Tactics.” *Rock The Vote*, June 2008

[http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_new\\_media\\_tactics-june-2008.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_new_media_tactics-june-2008.pdf) (10 November 2011).

32 Douglas R. Hess and Jody Herman, “Representational Bias in the 2008 Electorate”, *Project Vote*, November 2009 [http://projectvote.org/images/publications/Reports%20on%20the%20Electorate/Representational%20Bias%20in%20the%202008%20Electorate.pdf](http://projectvote.org/images/publications/Reports%20on%20the%20Electorate/Representational%20Bias%20in%20the%202008%20Electorate/Representational%20Bias%20in%20the%202008%20Electorate.pdf)

33 Under current law, a youth may only pre-register if he or she will be 18 on or before the date of the next election.

34 Michael P. McDonald, “Portable Voter Registration.” Springer Science & Business Media, LLC., 5 February 2008.



4.6%.<sup>35</sup> Another study found that notifying young voters in Georgia via text about the start and end of early voting caused an increase in turnout of 4.2%. Reaching out to youth voters who moved with a combination of regular mail, email and text messaging resulted in a 12% re-registration rate.<sup>36</sup>

## Minorities

The 2010 U.S. Census reported Connecticut's white population at 78%. The two largest minority groups in Connecticut are Latinos (13%) and African Americans (10%).<sup>37</sup> Historically, turnout for minority groups has not been representative of their portion of the population. Even in 2008, which showed the highest minority turnout to date, white voters nationwide made up 76% of the electorate, even though they only made up 67% of the national population.<sup>38</sup> In 2010, 12% of African Americans voted, as opposed to 13% in 2006.<sup>39</sup> The Latino vote in 2010 made up less than 7% of actual voters, even though they make up 16.3% of the nation's population.<sup>40</sup>

The 2008 presidential election showed no increase in overall voter participation from 2004, but this was not true where minorities are concerned. On the national level, African Americans showed the greatest increase in participation at 4.9%, while Hispanics (2.7%) and Asians (2.4%) showed modest increases. White voter participation actually decreased by 1.1%.<sup>41</sup> One possible reason for the increase in minority turnout is an increase in the number of eligible voters who are Asian or Hispanic.<sup>42</sup>

Another possible reason for increased turnout in 2008 can be seen in an examination of how support for the two major candidates broke down among racial and ethnic lines. 95% of African Americans, 67% of Latinos, and 62% of Asians voted for Barack Obama. Only 43% of white voters supported Obama.<sup>43</sup> A 2005 study on how to mobilize Latino voters found that they are more likely to participate when an appeal to participate is made by coethnics and copartisans.<sup>44</sup> A 2003 study found that African American voter turnout increased by 2.5% for each black candidate on the ballot.<sup>45</sup> A 2004 study showed that Latinos with strong ethnic attachment tend to support coethnic candidates, even if those candidates are from

35 "Text/SMS Messaging is an Effective Method for Engaging Young Voters," The Student PIRGs, 6 September 2007 <http://www.studentpirgs.org/new-voters-project/research/text-messaging>.

36 Chris Kennedy & Michelle Mayorga, "Text Message Experiments in 2008," Rock the Vote, 18 November 2008 <http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/text-message-experiments-2008.pdf>.

37 United States Census Bureau, "2010 Census Interactive Population Search" (Washington, D.C., 2010) <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=08>.

38 Mark Hugo Lopez, "Dissecting the 2008 Electorate: Most Diverse in U.S. History," Pew Research Center Publications, 30 April 2009 <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1209/racial-ethnicvoters-presidential-election>.

39 "Census Bureau Reports Hispanic Voter Turnout Reaches Record High for Congressional Election," U.S. Census Bureau, 28 September 2011, <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/voting/cb11-164.html>.

40 "Record Latino Turnout in US 2010 Midterm Election, but Well Below Potential," Mercopress: South Atlantic News Agency, 28 April 2011 <http://en.mercopress.com/2011/04/28/record-latino-turnout-in-us-2010-mid-term-election-but-well-below-potential>.

41 Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor, "Dissecting the 2008 Electorate: Most Diverse in U.S. History," Pew Research Center, 30 April 2009 <http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/dissecting-2008-electorate.pdf>.

42 Ibid.

43 Mark Hugo Lopez, "The Latino Vote in the 2010 Elections," Pew Research Center, 30 December 2010 <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/130.pdf>.

44 Melissa R. Michelson, "Meeting the Challenge of Latino Voter Mobilization," American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 6, (September 2005).

45 Ebonya Washington, "How Black Candidates Affect Voter Turnout," Yale University Department of Economics: Working Papers, 2006 <http://www.econ.yale.edu/ddp/ddp00/ddp0016.pdf>.



another political party.<sup>46</sup>

Some argue that coethnicity was not the only reason for high African American turnout in 2008. Other factors like higher levels of outreach to the black community by the Obama campaign surely contributed to turnout,<sup>47</sup> and it is important to remember that all voters tend to respond to traditional mobilization efforts. Still, the effect of having a candidate from one's own racial or ethnic group cannot be ignored.

Connecticut is uniquely positioned to leverage this with its Citizens' Election Program, discussed in more detail previously in this report. Through public financing of legislative and statewide races, it has become a much more accessible goal to run for political office. The program is designed to take advantage of the power of small contributions from local community members so that those who may not otherwise have access to the cash to run for office can run a successful campaign. The city of New Haven has a public financing system in place for municipal campaigns as well. By specifically advertising the Citizens' Election Program in conjunction with voter registration drives targeted at underperforming communities, we can show new voters in these communities that they or someone they know can run for office.

Early voting can take the form of mail-in or absentee ballots, or early in-person voting. Connecticut currently only offers early voting in the form of absentee ballots, and only for a very narrow set of circumstances. However, 32 states provide no-excuse early voting in one form or another. According to the U.S. Census, 30% of voters reported voting before Election Day.<sup>48</sup> This number was up from 19% in the 2006 election.<sup>49</sup> More than 50% of voters in early voting states favor early voting.

While historically, early voters tended to be older, more educated and wealthier than the general public, the 2008 election upended this trend. For the first time, African Americans voted early at a higher rate than whites. Also for the first time, Latino usage of early voting matched that of whites.<sup>50</sup> In North Carolina, 28% of early voters were black, even though they only made up 21% of registered voters.<sup>51</sup> More than half of North Carolina's African American votes were cast prior to Election Day.<sup>52</sup> The 2008 election showed a marked increase in the use of early voting by all Americans who had the option, and especially among minority groups. Only time will tell if that year was an anomaly or the beginning of a new trend. Still, early voting bears further study as a possible mechanism for reaching minority voters.

Recent movements to limit access to the polls in some states are troubling. Efforts to limit voting to those with state-issued photo identification are cropping up across the country. Photo identifications are usually issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles and there is a fee attached. While some states have

46 Matt A Barreto, "The Role of Latino Candidates in Mobilizing Latino Voters: Revisiting Latino Vote Choice," University of California, Irvine, 30 April 2004.

47 Tash S. Philpot, Daron R. Shaw, and Ernest B. McGowen. "Winning the Race: Black Voter Turnout in the 2008 Presidential Election," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 73, Issue 5 (2009) <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/73/5/995.full>.

48 Thom File and Sarah Crissey, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008," United States Census Bureau, (Washington, D.C., May 2010) <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p20-562.pdf>.

49 Thom File, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2006," United States Census Bureau, (Washington D.C., June 2008) <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p20-557.pdf>.

50 Teresa James, "Early In-Person Voting: Effects on Underrepresented Voters, Voting Turnout, and Election Administration," Project Vote, 2010 <http://www.projectvote.org/early-voting.html>.

51 Peter Nicholas "Early Turnout Defies Trend," The Los Angeles Times, 25 October 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/oct/25/nation/na-earlyvoting25>.

52 "They Want to Make Voting Harder?" The New York Times, 05 June 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/06/opinion/06moni.html>.



offered to waive the fee for those seeking only voter identification as opposed to driver's licenses, there is still added effort and expense associated with taking the time off from work and traveling to the nearest DMV. Many citizens do not utilize the DMV under normal circumstances because they do not own a car or drive.

Because of this, the fall-back method of using the DMV for voter contact and voter verification fails to reach large swaths of citizens, often with a racial or ethnic bias. Voting activists in Connecticut should be mindful of the effort to require photo identification at the polls. They should also be aware when utilizing agencies to reach out to voters—as the National Voter Registration Act intended—of the potential for missing important parts of the voter population by working only with the DMV. Rather, other service agencies should be included in these efforts, such as the Department of Social Services, the Department of Developmental Services, and other social service agencies that regularly come into contact with those not served by the DMV. The office of the Secretary of the State should work with these agencies to ensure that they have proper training and resources to carry out voter registration.

### Voters with Disabilities

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was signed into law in 2002. It was created in response to the debacle that was the 2000 presidential election. Among several other issues, it addressed the accessibility of voting locations for people with disabilities by mandating that at least one voting machine per polling place meets accessibility requirements for people with disabilities. In Connecticut, there are two major mechanisms that address this requirement.

The first is the use of the IVS, which is a telephone-based technology that primarily helps the visually impaired by providing audio instructions for placing a vote. This system has been somewhat successful in its implementation, when proper training is provided. It has a number of limitations. For example, it is primarily designed for the visually impaired versus other groups of voters with disabilities, and sometimes poll workers lack the proper training to efficiently utilize the system. A viable alternative to this system should be sought.

The second mechanism, curbside voting, addresses the larger community of people with disabilities. Much like the popular feature of curbside pickup at restaurants, voters with disabilities wishing to utilize this service just need to call ahead to alert election staff that they are on their way to the polling place. Election officials then bring a ballot out to the voter, who can complete it while still in the vehicle. This is not an ideal solution, and it does not provide for independent voting. As the Connecticut Office for Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities points out, voters with disability utilizing this option are not afforded the same level of privacy as voters who are able to access voting booths.<sup>53</sup>

Oregon made headlines in the 2011 election for its use of iPads to help voters with disabilities cast their votes. Election officials went to the homes of voters with disabilities and allowed the voters to use the iPad to mark the candidates of their choice. A completed paper ballot was then printed with a small portable printer and used for counting purposes.<sup>54</sup> The Election Performance Task Force's Technology Fair

53 Gretchen Knauff, Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities before the Government Administration and Elections Committee, 28 February 2007.

54 Katharine Q. Seelye, "Oregon Tests iPads as Aid to Disabled Voters," The New York Times, 16 November 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/17/us/oregon-tries-out-voting-by-ipad-for-disabled.html>.



demonstrated a similar technology that utilizes computers to allow absentee and disabled voters to mark their votes electronically on a screen. Another vendor at the fair offered items including voting booths, signs, ramps and other accessibility products to ensure that voters with disabilities have proper access to the polls.

These types of innovative pilot programs and new technologies offer hope that, in the foreseeable future, a truly equitable system could be established for voters with disabilities to cast their ballots. In the meantime, Connecticut should ensure that election staff is properly trained on the IVS System, that all polling places are easily handicapped-accessible, and that curbside voting is more effectively advertised to voters with disabilities.

### Overseas & Military Voters

American voters who are overseas for military or other purposes at election time face unique challenges in casting a vote. Over the years, federal legislation has sought to address the issue. In 1986, Congress passed the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, or UOCAVA. It required all states to allow certain overseas U.S. citizens to cast a ballot by absentee for federal elections. The group of people covered by this act is often referred to as UOCAVA voters. They include members of the uniformed services, members of the U.S. Merchant Marine, eligible family members of these two groups, U.S. citizens employed by the federal government residing outside the country, and other private U.S. citizens residing outside the country.

In 2009, the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act became federal law. The MOVE Act contained several provisions to make the absentee ballot process easier and more efficient for UOCAVA voters. As noted previously, the absentee ballot process is arduous for voters living within Connecticut. Military and overseas voters face greatly lengthened post times for regular mail and other additional burdens. Some states required that overseas ballots be notarized before being returned, for instance. Among other things, the MOVE Act eliminated additional requirements imposed on these voters, such as notarization; it established a 45-day window prior to any federal election for the transmittal of blank and completed ballots; and it required states to make certain things available electronically, including election information, voter registration and absentee ballot applications.

*75,831 absentee ballots were cast in Connecticut in the 1968 presidential election.  
21% were from members of the armed services.*

The Overseas Vote Foundation performs post-election surveys of UOCAVA voters, and data from this survey is used to develop the UOCAVA State Policy Index. The index measures states in the areas of registration and balloting. For 2010, Connecticut was tied for the second-worst score with Louisiana. This was a drop from 2008, when it tied with several other states for the sixth-worst score.<sup>55</sup> Our state needs to do better when it comes to serving our overseas and military voters.

55 Thad E. Hall, and Claire M. Smith, "Overseas Voter Satisfaction in 2010" Overseas Vote Foundation, March 2011 [https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/files/Hall\\_Smith\\_VoterSatisfaction\\_March2011.doc](https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/files/Hall_Smith_VoterSatisfaction_March2011.doc).



Specifically, mailing time can be cut significantly with a couple of simple actions. First, Connecticut residents overseas should be encouraged to submit their absentee ballot applications electronically, either by fax or email. The original applications must then be returned in the envelope with the completed ballot. Second, Connecticut Town Clerks should transmit blank ballots to overseas and military voters electronically (preferably by email) whenever possible. These two simple actions have the ability to condense UOCAVA voters' application and ballot receipt procedures into a process that could take just days instead of weeks, and are authorized under the federal MOVE Act. The state government should help ensure that local governments have the training and resources to implement these procedures. For example, Connecticut's Centralized Voter Registration System could play an integral role in the tracking and overall streamlining of the overseas and military absentee ballot process.

### Restoration of Voting Rights to Former Felons

The ability to vote helps to create a sense of involvement and interest in the community. This is especially true for those who already feel separated from society. The United States is the only country that allows permanent disenfranchisement of former felons even after the completion of their sentences.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, citizens that have been incarcerated often feel isolated from the community, and many would welcome the opportunity for civic involvement after serving their sentences.

5.3 million American citizens are not permitted to vote because of a criminal conviction. There are approximately 4 million citizens living and working within the country who are denied the right to vote because of a past conviction.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, many citizens who were convicted of misdemeanor crimes (as opposed to felonies) mistakenly believe that they have permanently lost their right to vote.

*If convicted of a felony for a violation of Title 9 of Connecticut Election Statutes, a person's electoral privileges cannot be restored until he or she has been discharged from probation.*

Voting rights for former felons vary from state to state, which can make it very confusing and frustrating for those trying to register after their release. Permanent disenfranchisement for all people with felony convictions currently exists in four states. Permanent disenfranchisement for some people with felony convictions exists in seven states. Five states automatically restore voting rights after release from prison and discharge from parole, including to probationers. Connecticut became one of these states in 2001. Yet 14 states and the District of Columbia restore voting rights automatically after release, including to parolees.<sup>58</sup>

Introduced in Congress in 2011, the Democracy Restoration Act would restore voting rights in federal elections to people with past criminal convictions upon prison sentence completion. The bill would ultimately enfranchise 4 million people and "not only encourage them to engage actively in civic life, but would also give them a chance to begin their lives anew with full citizenship rights..."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> "Felon Voting Rights: Restoring Voting Rights to Former Felons," Project Vote, 2012 <http://www.projectvote.org/felon-voting.html>.

<sup>57</sup> "Voting After Criminal Conviction," Brennan Center For Justice, [http://www.brennancenter.org/content/section/category/voting\\_after\\_criminal\\_conviction](http://www.brennancenter.org/content/section/category/voting_after_criminal_conviction).

<sup>58</sup> "Criminal Disenfranchisement Laws Across the United States," Brennan Center For Justice, <http://www.brennancenter.org/page/-/Democracy/USA%20MAP%203.23.2011.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> Nicole Austin-Hillery and Nic Riley, "The Other 5 Million," Brennan Center for Justice, 16 December 2011 <http://the-hill.com/blogs/congress-blog/civil-rights/199871-the-other-five-million>.



There is work to be done within Connecticut to aid former felons in voter registration. In accordance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, the Secretary of the State has the ability to designate certain state agencies as voter registration agencies. By designating the Department of Corrections as such an agency, the Secretary of the State can work with that agency to ensure that former felons are offered the opportunity to register to vote at certain points of contact.

When a prisoner is released, he or she receives a packet of paperwork that includes information on re-entering society. Included in this packet could be an explanation of restoration of voting rights to former felons, as well as a voter registration form. When probation officers receive notification of a change of address, they can offer the person an opportunity to register to vote at his new address. The official designation of the Connecticut Department of Corrections as a voter registration agency would aid in efforts such as these.



## Post-Election & Year-Round Election Administration

One subcommittee of the Election Performance Task Force met to address post-election and year-round election administration issues. Their discussion included post-election audits, ballot storage, recanvass procedures, election costs, and technology issues.

The printing of ballots in Connecticut is done through two printers that have been certified by the vendor of the state's vote tabulating machines. The vendor manages the programming of memory cards for these machines prior to each election. Because the vendor programs the memory cards, it also controls the certification process for the printing of ballots. Some members of the task force subcommittee felt that the vendor's control of the memory card programming, in conjunction with the certification process for the printing of ballots, leads to extra red tape in getting more printers approved and a lack of open competition in the marketplace for ballot printing. Some states and municipalities program their own memory cards, giving them more control and flexibility in the printing of ballots. The Secretary of the State's office should explore ways of coordinating the printing of ballots with the programming of memory cards as a way to create a more efficient, reliable and cost-effective process.

The current post-election auditing system in Connecticut was established as a way of verifying the accuracy of machine-counted ballots. It was established when the state switched from lever voting machines to scanned paper ballots. One gap in the current system exists in the area of the counting of absentee ballots. While these ballots are counted by a machine, the counting may take place either at individual polling locations or in a central location. Under the current system, those ballots that are centrally counted are excluded from the audit process. If the purpose of the post-election audit is to verify the accuracy of machine counts, then the audit should include all machine-counted ballots, including those that are counted centrally.

It was agreed by all that data is lacking in the area of election costs; that centralization of the post-election audit process could achieve cost savings; and that consistency in election administration could be better achieved by the implementation of best practices and standards. Some members of the subcommittee additionally felt that the current recanvass timeframe is too short; that additional emphasis should be placed on ballot storage security; and that more financial support for Registrar training is needed.



*Secretary of the State Election Performance Task Force August 31st Meeting,  
courtesy of the Connecticut Network*

### Election Funding & Cost Efficiencies

At the August 31 Election Performance Task Force meeting, Doug Chapin, Director of the Program for Excellence in Election Administration at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, identified cost as a major issue on the 2011 nationwide election administration horizon. Given the state of the economy in



recent years and the grim predictions for the near future, this comes in the form of yearly budget cuts and constant pressure to find new cost efficiencies. As discussed in detail in another area of the findings, the reporting of data and its aggregation and use is severely lacking in election administration. While this remains true in the area of election costs, it is starting to change—likely as a result of the recent increase in fiscal scrutiny throughout government.

$$\text{efficiency} = \text{cost} \div \text{output}$$

Efficiency is defined in mathematical terms simply as cost divided by output. Election administrators collect a lot of information on output—things like number of registered voters and voter turnout—and are beginning in some areas to report the top part of the equation, cost. One easy measure of efficiency is cost per voter of an election. In December 2008, Connecticut's Office of Fiscal Analysis conducted a survey on the cost of that year's presidential election to municipalities. The survey was done in conjunction with the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut. With a 57% response rate, the average reported cost per voter was \$1.53. Reported costs varied from a low of 28¢ to a high of \$6.51.

A study by Russ Ragsdale, Clerk and Recorder for Broomfield County, Colorado, examined the cost of the same presidential election in Colorado. He placed the cost per Colorado voter at between \$2.92 and \$39.01, averaging \$8.49. A study of the Colorado 2010 general election in comparable categories showed an average cost of \$6.70 per voter.<sup>60</sup> The difference in cost between 2008 and 2010 can be attributed to the difference in turnout from a presidential year versus a non-presidential statewide election.

Part of the higher cost per Colorado voter can be attributed to the various options the state offers to its voters, including mail-in and in-person voting; polling place and vote center voting; and early in-person voting. Another cause of the low reported per voter cost in Connecticut is that different municipalities likely included different types of costs in their reports, and may have failed to include a complete picture of election costs. For example, it is unlikely that Bethany, with a total expenditure of \$1,515, captured the full costs of machine maintenance or accounted for an annualized breakdown of capital costs for equipment. Additionally, any full accounting of election costs must include costs incurred by Town Clerks in the management of the absentee ballot process. Costs incurred by Town Clerks include labor costs, postage costs and others.

Of the five largest cities in Connecticut, only Bridgeport responded to the 2008 survey, leaving another large void in Connecticut's data. By comparison, of the five smallest towns, only two failed to respond. Given the low response rate and the variations in reported data for the Connecticut 2008 survey, it would not be wise to make assumptions about election costs in our state. However, with higher response rates and more detailed explanations of costs, the Colorado surveys provide a fuller picture of election costs. Some findings there may apply to Connecticut as well.

In Colorado, the highest cost drivers have been staffing, printing and capital costs. Ragsdale found that temporary and overtime staff pay accounted for 33.8% of 2008 election costs; that ballot printing accounted for 30%; and that technical support accounted for 12.5%. The average cost for producing

60 Peggy Cucuiti and Allan Wallis, "Changing the Way Colorado Votes: A Study of Selected Reforms," Office of the Colorado Secretary of State, February 2011 p. 35.



ballots was \$1.20 per registered voter, with a range of \$0.55 to \$2.22 per registered voter. Economies of scale were discovered to play a role—rural counties had a significantly higher cost per voter (average \$10.21) than urban counties (average \$4.92). Specifically in the area of ballot printing, the low volume used by rural counties led to higher costs per ballot.<sup>61</sup>

*The passage of the Help America Vote Act was accompanied by an influx of federal money into Connecticut's election system. Part of the money was used for the purchase and maintenance of electronic voting machines throughout the state. However, the HAVA money is nearly gone and will leave a large gap in local election funding as municipalities take over the maintenance of these machines.*

Other specific national findings about cost and potential savings include:

- Paper voter registration forms cost about 83¢ to process in Maricopa County, Arizona; online registrations cost about 3¢.<sup>62</sup>
- Voter registration costs \$2.55 per active voter in larger Oregon counties, compared with \$4.03 in smaller counties.<sup>63</sup>
- California counties could realize a 9% savings in election expenses if a portion of their voters opted out of receiving paper mailings and agreed to electronic updates.<sup>64</sup>
- The number of temporary election staff hired in King County, Washington, dropped from between 2000 and 3000 to just 200 to 300 after switching to all mail-in ballots.<sup>65</sup>
- Maintaining Oregon's voter registration system in 2008 cost \$4.11 per active registered voter. In Canada, where an automated, online voter registration system is utilized, the cost is about 35¢.<sup>66</sup>

For the purposes of this report, the Secretary of the State's office undertook a cursory examination of some Connecticut municipalities' budgets. The top ten and bottom ten towns for voter turnout in the 2010 general election were selected for examination. The towns' budgets were examined for percentages spent on the offices of the Registrar of Voters

and the Town Clerk. It should be noted that while Town Clerks spend a significant portion of their time on non-election activities, this examination counted that office's entire budget. The resulting percentages are therefore not entirely accurate but provide a starting point for future study. It was found that the top ten towns spent more on both Registrars of Voters and Town Clerks. The top ten spent an average of .3% of their budgets on Registrars of voters, compared with .2% for the bottom ten. The top ten towns spent 1% of their budgets on Town Clerks, compared with .6% in the bottom ten.

A more detailed and formalized study of the cost of elections in Connecticut should be undertaken. The study should establish a standardized and very specific set of data measures, including annual salary and benefits for election staff and an estimate of staff time spent on specific election duties; an annualization of capital costs for all voting equipment, maintenance and software licensing; overtime for year-round

61 Ibid.

62 "Bringing Elections into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Voter Registration and Modernization," The Pew Center on the States, August 2009

63 "The Real Cost of Voter Registration: An Oregon Case Study," The Pew Center on the States, March 2010 [http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/The\\_Real\\_Cost\\_of\\_Voter\\_Registration\(1\).pdf?n=4907](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/The_Real_Cost_of_Voter_Registration(1).pdf?n=4907).

64 "The Cost of Delivering Voter Information: A Case Study of California," The Pew Center on the States, March 2011 [http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/California\\_costs\\_brief.pdf](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/California_costs_brief.pdf).

65 Mike Alvine, "Government Accountability and Oversight Committee: Staff Report," 16 August 2011 p. 3. <http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/231513-king-county-council-elections-report.html#document/p1>.

66 David Becker, Election Performance Task Force meeting, 19 October 2011.



staff; temporary staff; any polling facility-related costs; ballot printing costs; mailing costs associated with absentee ballots; other election-related costs accrued to Town Clerks, Registrars of Voters, and to the town in general; and election-related costs that are covered by the state and federal government.

*Towns in Connecticut with the highest voter turnout in the November 2010 election spent an average of 1.4% of their total budgets on offices that performed election-related activities. The average spent by the towns with the lowest voter turnout was .8%.*

### Regionalization and Centralization

Connecticut differs from most other states in that its county-level governments were abolished in 1960. Consequently, only the state and local governments are involved in election administration, with most of the responsibilities falling on municipalities. Most other states have active county governments that provide a level of regionalized voting services and a shared cost structure. Some states have further regionalized the voting process with the creation of voting centers.

Regional voting centers have been utilized in cities such as Phoenix, Arizona, where 128 polling places were condensed into 26 voting centers located in business and shopping areas and on transit routes and main roads. Any voter can utilize any voting center beginning on Saturday and Monday leading up to the election, as well as on Election Day. Election costs were expected to decrease by about \$250,000 due to fewer locations and workers required. Additional advantages cited by the city of Phoenix include ease of voting, expanded voting days, a reduced need for provisional ballots, and improved sites, service and support.<sup>67</sup>

In San Mateo County, California, two regional voting centers are open Monday through Friday beginning 29 days prior to the election and complement traditional Election Day polling places. One voting center is open on the Saturday before the election as well. Voters from anywhere in the county can drop off mail-in ballots at these locations (or at any city hall in the county) or can choose to cast an in-person ballot early. No votes are counted until the polls are closed on Election Day. Those who choose to vote by mail can be added to a permanent vote by mail list. San Mateo County also provides a feature to track and confirm online when ballot materials were mailed to a voter and when the returned mail-in ballot was received.<sup>68</sup>

In Connecticut, regional voting centers could be utilized as a way to consolidate polls in urban areas and offer voters the opportunity to vote near their job, their home or their children's day care, whichever is most convenient. In rural areas, voting centers could also provide regional support to towns whose size currently prevents them from providing adequate resources to local Registrars of Voters. For example, some small Connecticut town halls are only open part time and are not able to provide Internet access to their election administrators.

Regional voting centers could offer Registrars of Voters and Town Clerks a satellite office that would be

<sup>67</sup> "Voting Centers," *City of Phoenix*, 26 August 2011, <http://phoenix.gov/election/elect6.html>,

<sup>68</sup> Mark Church, "Voting Period Begins October 11 for November 8 Election," *Shape the Future*, 6 October 2011 <https://www.shapethefuture.org/pressreleases/2011/100611.asp>.



open to them during normal business hours five days a week leading up to an election. In emergencies such as the massive power outage that followed the October 2011 snowstorm, these centers would offer alternate resources to hard-hit towns. With the proper equipment, the state could use these locations for regional on-demand ballot printing, meaning that new ballots, if needed, are within a few towns' drive and available within hours, not days.

One reason the county system was abolished over fifty years ago may be the small size of Connecticut. At approximately 3.57 million, our state's population is roughly the same as some counties in other states. At 5018 square miles, we are about the same size as many counties in other states. Given this, centralization of some election administration areas may make sense and achieve the most cost savings. For instance, Connecticut should consider purchasing a single high-speed, high-accuracy ballot-scanning machine that could be utilized to centralize and streamline the post-election audit process. This would alleviate costs associated with local audits that currently accrue to municipalities. Other advantages to regionalization and centralization include cost-sharing, creating economies of scale for bulk purchasing, and standardization of election worker training.

### Strengthening Connecticut's Voter Registration System

On October 19, 2011, David Becker, Director of Election Initiatives for the Pew Center on the States, spoke to the Election Performance Task Force about voter registration. About one in eight voter records nationwide are no longer active or valid. About 12 million records have address problems, partly due to human error in the paper-based data entry process. Three million voters have records in more than one state, not because of voter fraud, but simply because their state of former residence does not know that they have moved.<sup>69</sup>

One way to combat the inaccuracies of the current system is online voter registration. By having voters enter their information directly into the system, the chances for human error are reduced. It also would allow for instant tracking of voter changes of address within Connecticut so that the town of former residence would automatically have the voter removed from its rolls. Online voter registration has been implemented in several states. It can require newly registered voters to provide information in person at the polls or it can utilize a second statewide database to verify voters' identities.



*Secretary of the State Election Performance Task Force October 19th Meeting, courtesy of the Connecticut Network*

The utilization of other databases is the second way to combat inaccuracies in the current system. By crosschecking the voter file with other databases such as the Department of Motor Vehicles or the Department of Social Services, the accuracy of the voter file can be greatly improved. By crosschecking



the Connecticut voter file with other states' voter files, our state can further weed out old or invalid registrations. This is the premise upon which the Pew Center's Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) was created. ERIC is in its planning stages now, and Connecticut should join the consortium of states that is building it.

### Connecticut's Election Administration: A Political Animal

Registrars of Voters are the chief municipal elections officials in Connecticut. Two registrars of voters exist in each town except Hartford: A Democrat and a Republican. In Hartford, the Working Families Party has established a significant enough presence that they now have a third Registrar. The members of the parties' town committees select the candidate that will run for their party's Registrar of Voters. If there is a disagreement within the party, a primary may be held. In Connecticut primaries, only members of a party may vote in that party's primary. Once the candidate is selected, either through the town committee or a party primary, his or her name is placed on the ballot in the general election. However, at this point it is more of a formality, as the general electorate is given a choice of only one candidate for Republican Registrar of Voters and only one candidate for Democratic Registrar of Voters. There is no Registrar of Voters representing unaffiliated voters and, in most cases, there is no Registrar of Voters representing minor parties.

<i>Connecticut Voters' Party Affiliation</i>			
<i><u>1958</u></i>		<i><u>2011</u></i>	
<i>Democrats:</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>Democrats:</i>	<i>37%</i>
<i>Republicans:</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>Republicans:</i>	<i>21%</i>
<i>Unaffiliated or Other:</i>	<i>42%</i>	<i>Unaffiliated or Other:</i>	<i>42%</i>

This antiquated system was thought to provide a balance of power and prevent fraud by one party or the other at a time when party bosses ruled the electoral process and officials did not even track the number of unaffiliated voters. It remains in existence in some states today, though many other states utilize a single nonpartisan election administrator or the county or town clerk, elected or appointed, to fill this role. In some states where the two-party registrar system still exists, certification processes and statewide standards have been established in an effort to professionalize the role and create accountability for registrars of voters. In Connecticut, there are no qualifications to become a registrar and there is no mechanism for removal of a registrar once elected.

The office of Registrar of Voters is of vital importance because of its fundamental role in coordinating and overseeing elections, and in extending the constitutional right to vote to our citizens. Registrars of Voters should not be above scrutiny. However, the role a Registrar fulfills is important to the fair administration of elections, and as such a registrar should not fear removal for political or social reasons. The procedure outlined in Section 7-22 of the Connecticut General Statutes for the removal of Town Clerks takes an appropriate middle ground to these competing concerns. The Secretary of the State feels the Town Clerk



removal process can serve as a model for a new statute that would allow for the removal of a Registrar of Voters. The removal process described in the statutes features six steps:

1. A complaint is made to the proper state's attorney's office alleging that the Town Clerk is guilty of misconduct, willful and material neglect of duty or incompetence in the conduct of the Town Clerk's office. Only one of these charges needs to be alleged, but the complaint should not be baseless.
2. The state's attorney will undertake an appropriate investigation.
3. If the investigation turns up evidence that supports the charges, the state's attorney will initiate action against the Town Clerk, and will notify the Clerk in writing that he or she is to appear in court to show cause why they should not be removed from office.
4. Notice of the charges must be served on the Town Clerk.
5. A hearing shall be conducted and the judge will enter a decision.
6. If the judge finds that the clerk is to be removed from office, the vacancy will be filled in accordance with Section 9-220 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

This process is not overly burdensome, nor is it arbitrary or capricious. It is a judicial process, removed from politics and preserving due process for the clerk in question. Other alternatives, such as impeachment, require the legislature to commit itself to the cause, involve a political branch of government and tend to take an extended period of time. Because Registrars of Voters protect a vital interest, voting, and their actions have immediate impact, this model is the appropriate mechanism for removing a Registrar of Voters from office.

Section 9-220 gives instruction on handling vacancies in a town office. The process is simple: the selectman fills the office, and if given authority, appoints a replacement. If the selectman cannot appoint a replacement, the town can call for a special election or the vacancy will be filled at the next election. The procedure for removal and replacement of a Registrar of Voters can be largely duplicated from Section 7-22 and can easily be added into the current vacancy election process as provided by Section 9-220. Because of the Registrar's authority in elections and voting, this safeguard is of utmost importance.

### Standardization

The need for standardization of the election process across jurisdictions has become an issue nationally and was raised several times in the Election Performance Task Force. If a voter goes to a polling location at any place in the state, the experience should be consistent. Best practices and standards should be developed around matters like voter registration, maintenance of the voter registration list, voter outreach and election staff training.

There is no hard-and-fast requirement that a voter show a picture identification at the polls in Connecticut. However, poll workers may ask for proof of residence in most elections. Identification requirements in Connecticut are for a preprinted form of identification which shows the voter's name and either her address, signature or photograph. Standardization of poll worker training across the state could prevent inadvertent violations of this and other requirements by temporary election staff.

Another area where standardization is important is ballot security. While guidelines do exist for the



storage of and access to completed ballots, these are not uniformly understood and enforced. Additionally, current guidelines were seen as lax by some members of the subcommittee. In order to ensure that Connecticut's ballots are as safe as reasonably possible, guidelines should include the storage of ballots in a secure, locked facility. Additionally, two individuals (preferably from different parties) should be present whenever these facilities are accessed. This policy is similar to standards in other states and should be uniformly followed and enforced.

When it comes to voter registration, many Registrars in our state make yearly visits to the local high school to register eligible students. Some send registration cards and letters to ex-felons informing them that their voting rights have been restored. There are many proactive steps like this that some Registrars around the state do on a regular basis. Highlighting them in the form of best practices could be a crucial tool in the continuing education of election administrators in Connecticut. Other specific areas in which best practices could be developed include recruitment of poll workers who are bilingual or who have disabilities; methods of outreach into communities that typically have low voter participation rates, such as working with service providers to those communities; and the cross-checking of voter registration lists with other local and state government databases.

There was consensus among the membership that the Secretary of the State and the State Elections Enforcement Commission should take a leadership role in the development of standards and best practices in Connecticut election administration.



## Voting Technology

On August 31, 2011, the Election Performance Task Force hosted a voting technology fair. Ten vendors demonstrated their goods and services to members of the task force, state and local elections officials. The task force does not endorse the purchase of specific products featured at the fair but encourages Connecticut election officials to further explore the use of new technologies through pilot programs and examination of other states' use.

ACE Electoral Knowledge Network offers guiding principles for use of technology in elections that are a good starting point when evaluating new technologies. They include considering the impact of introducing new technologies; considering security issues; testing the accuracy of results produced; ensuring privacy and inclusiveness; and considering the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of new technologies.<sup>70</sup>

Our state's voter registration database, known as the Connecticut Voter Registration System or CVRS, is maintained by the Secretary of the State and available online to all Registrars of Voters and Town Clerks. CVRS can be adapted to further streamline election administration processes. Particularly when it comes to the absentee ballot process, the software could automate the numbering of absentee ballots, print necessary address labels and maintain all related lists in one centralized location. CVRS could play a part in verifying petition signatures as well. Beyond building these new functions into the software, proper training and support to election administrators must be provided.

The Secretary of the State is currently working to launch Election Night Reporting, a new program that will allow the electronic submission of election results which will then be immediately available for public viewing online. Currently, election officials transcribe results and do calculations by hand. Unofficial results are hand-recorded onto forms that are faxed to the Secretary of the State. At a later date, official results are submitted to the Secretary. The new program will provide a local tool to help record and report totals more efficiently and reliably. Election officials will log into the system locally, enter the results into the program and have all calculations done for them automatically by the program. Unofficial results will be available immediately for public viewing and generation of reports through the Secretary's website. Local officials will have access to more reporting capabilities and the program will generate the official returns as well, eliminating further chances for human error.

Along with the pursuit of more advanced technology, Connecticut needs to focus on ensuring that all its election administrators have proper access to existing technologies. Though CVRS has the capacity to serve election administrators in all of our state's 169 towns, not all towns are able to provide proper Internet connectivity to their election administrators. The Secretary of the State can play a proactive role by reaching out to these towns to encourage connectivity for all election administrators. Ideally, all towns should provide proper connectivity prior to the 2012 presidential election.

It was clear to the members of the task force that there is a need for a more technologically savvy group to analyze other new technology issues. The Connecticut Town Clerks Association has a standing committee on technology, as does the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut. A Voting Technology Standards Board was established in 2005 to inform the process of switching from lever voting

<sup>70</sup> "Guiding Principles of Elections and Technology," The Electoral Knowledge Project, <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/et/et20>.



machines. The board was established in the Connecticut General Statutes (Section 9-242c) and contained members from the Secretary of the State, the State Elections Enforcement Commission, the Government Administration and Elections Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, Registrars of Voters, Town Clerks, University of Connecticut experts in computer technology, and nonpartisan governmental accountability organizations. Perhaps this could serve as a model for the establishment of a new, ongoing statewide committee to investigate voting technology with an eye toward providing better service, streamlining procedures and achieving cost savings.

### Technology Fair Vendors

**Products:** ES&S DS200, ES&S DS850, VoteRemote

**Vendors:** Election Systems & Software

**Product Description and Claims:**

1. ES&S DS200 is a precinct-based paper ballot tabulator designed with flexibility to support a wide range of ballot configurations and designs. It allows for more efficient accumulation and transmission of votes, directly from the polling place. It can scan both sides of a ballot, simultaneously, with a high-resolution image scanner.
2. ES&S DS850 is a digital central-count scanner and tabulation system that has proven to be an efficient solution for paper ballot processing. It can scan over three ballots per second - even mailed folded ballots.
3. VoteRemote is designed to automate the processing, printing and mailing aspects of the absentee/vote by mail process.

**Product:** ImageCast Tabulation

**Vendors:** Dominion Voting Systems

**Product Description and Claims:**

1. ImageCast Tabulation is a product line of hardware for precinct-level vote scanners, accessible voting technologies and high-speed central tabulators.
2. It provides combined ballot scanning and accessible voting, integrated ballot security features, ballot image auditing capability and independent accessible ballot review

**Product:** BallotSafe

**Vendors:** Election Systems & Software and ScytI

**Product Description and Claims:**

1. BallotSafe is a fully integrated online ballot delivery and marking system that will afford military, overseas, absentee and disabled voters the opportunity to cast ballots in a timely, secure and reliable manner.
2. BallotSafe provides for Intelligent Ballot Delivery with easy to use onscreen marking capability. Ballots can be securely returned and tracked throughout the process, increasing operational efficiencies.

*Electronic poll books were tested in Simsbury, Torrington and Vernon during the November 2011 election. Judith Beaudreau, Registrar of Voters for Vernon, called the poll books "terrific." Despite challenges like no Internet and the combining of polling locations due to the October snow storm, she found it a lot simpler and more accurate. Judith said it was harder to train poll workers to use paper than to use the electronic poll book.*



### ***Elections in 5 Years***

*In five years, Connecticut will have had time to pass and implement a constitutional amendment to allow the legislature to make decisions about absentee and early voting. No-excuse absentee balloting will likely be permitted. Voter registration will be completed online and a digital signature will be on file for every voter. For those who do go to the polls on Election Day, they will be checked in with electronic poll books, which will instantly update the Centralized Voter Registration System with up-to-the-minute turnout information. When the polls close, results will be electronically transmitted and made available for the public to view online. Voters in Connecticut will continue to become more diverse and more mobile, and their voter registrations will have the capability of moving with them to a new town or a new precinct within a town. Election Day registration will allow new voters to choose to participate right up until Election Day.*

**Product:** EViD

**Vendor:** Decision Support

#### **Product Description and Claims:**

1. EViD is an electronic poll book solution to manage the administrative and voter check-in processes at polling places.
2. EViD Workstation can be deployed in polling places for early voting, as well as on Election Day, and is the point of check-in for voters.
3. EViD Link enables import and formatting of voter registration, street, polling place and ballot style data from voter registration systems for use by the EViD Workstation.
4. EViD Control provides a common database and management tool for data imported by EViD Link. EViD Control also provides summary and detailed reports of election check-in activity.
5. EViD WEB Central – EViD WEB Central enables synchronization and distribution of voter check-ins and registration updates between polling places and the election jurisdiction.
6. EVARS (EViD Voter Activity Review System) is the post-election review system for review and reporting of voter check-in activity.

**Product:** CT Election Results

**Vendor:** PCC Technology Group

#### **Product Description and Claims:**

1. An online system for reporting results from polling places on election night.
2. Supports publishing online results including early publishing of unofficial results.

**Product:** VoteSafe

**Vendor:** Votec

#### **Product Description and Claims:**

1. VoteSafe is an electronic poll book and voting management system.
2. Live Help feature supports instant messaging between poll sites and central offices.

**Products:** Voting booths, signs, ramps and accessibility products

**Vendor:** Inclusion=Solutions

#### **Product Descriptions and Claims:**

1. Four station voting booths, voting booth accessories and accessible voting booths.
2. Building entrance products like BigBell and BallotCall to make

the polling places accessible.

3. Signs, displays, ramps and voting supplies for polling places.
4. Consulting and training services.



**Product:** Clarity Solutions

**Vendor:** SOE Software

**Product Descriptions and Claims:**

1. Clarity Training is an online and interactive Poll Worker Training Program with customizable content.
2. Clarity Connect is a content management system with social media component for the public facing website.
3. Clarity Forms Manager is a web-based information gathering tool.
4. Clarity Live Help provides online chat capabilities for customer service.
5. Clarity Mobile provides solutions to deliver content in the mobile space through mobile Web, SMS, etc.
6. Clarity ENR is an election night reporting tool with online results publishing.
7. Clarity Tracking is an election asset tracking and management tool that lets officials tag physical assets and produce audit reports.
8. Clarity Control is an election calendar and task management tool.
9. Clarity Support is a call center and issue tracking solution.

**Product:** Datacard Advocate Precinct Management System

**Vendor:** Datacard Group

**Product Description:**

The Advocate system speeds and simplifies Election Day processing by replacing paper poll books and manual voter processing with electronic poll books.

**Product Claims:**

1. Faster and more accurate processing of voter information at polling places on Election Day.
2. Automates voter check-in and eliminates paper poll books.
3. Supports capturing images and issuing ID cards to election officials and poll workers.
4. Supports Election Day voter registrations.

**Product:** Sentio Ballot Printing System

**Vendor:** Runbeck Election Services

**Product Description:**

The Sentio system is an on-demand ballot printing system that lets election officials produce their own ballots – from large batches of absentee requests to individual ballots for early voting or counter ballots.

**Product Claims:**

1. On-demand ballot printing that can be used at polling places.
2. Eliminates printing of unused ballots resulting in cost savings.

***Elections in 10 Years***

*In ten years, online security will have progressed enough for military and overseas voters to cast their ballots online within a window of a few weeks prior to Election Day. Regional vote centers will open to allow citizens to cast their votes anytime in the weeks leading up to Election Day. These centers will replace the traditional polling location. The cost of elections will shift and likely drop as the need for temporary staff and overtime at election time is mitigated by the use of technology. Voter registration will follow a person nationwide as they move from state to state. Military and overseas voter participation will increase dramatically with the advent of remote online voting. Campaign techniques will change drastically—candidates will be forced to reach out to a wider circle of potential voters but will be able to target their efforts more efficiently as they track who has and has not already cast their vote.*



## Recommendations

*Identify measures that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the voting process.*

1. The Secretary recommends an amendment to Article 6, Section 7 of the Connecticut State Constitution similar to House Joint Resolution Number 88 of the 2011 legislative session. The amendment would allow the General Assembly to adopt more flexible laws for voting.
2. The Secretary recommends partnering with Professor Heather Gerken to develop a Connecticut Democracy Index. This would allow for benchmarking across municipalities and with other states to track trends in the election process, to measure performance and to gain valuable data that can inform decisions going forward.
3. The Secretary recommends streamlining the absentee ballot process. A working group should be formed to examine and make recommendations around ideas like creating a single absentee ballot application and linking the absentee ballot tracking system with the Centralized Voter Registration System.
4. The Secretary recommends further study of how regionalism could make Connecticut's electoral system more cost-effective and consistent. For instance, the use of a statewide online voter registration system, regional on-demand ballot printing, and regional voting centers should all be further explored.
5. The Secretary recommends that the polling place for district elections be the same as for state elections. This will help eliminate voter confusion caused by having to go to different polling locations for different elections.
6. The Secretary recommends exploring better ways of coordinating the printing of ballots with programming of memory cards in order to create a more efficient, reliable and cost-effective process.
7. The Secretary recommends the development of a certification process for Registrars of Voters. Additionally, standards and best practices should be developed for that office around issues such as election administration, voter registration and voter outreach. These standards and best practices may need to account for differences in small, medium and large municipalities. Finally, a mechanism for enforcement and, if necessary, the removal of a Registrar of Voters should be created.
8. The Secretary recommends that a formal study of the cost of elections be undertaken, and that a standardized set of measures for such costs be established.

*Maintain the security and integrity of the voting process.*

9. The Secretary recommends the development of a secure online voter registration system in Connecticut. The system should be tied to other statewide databases, such as the Department of Social Services, the Department of Developmental Services, and the Department of Motor Vehicles, to allow for verification of data.



10. The Secretary recommends that the state acquire at least one high speed, high volume scanner to be utilized in the post-election auditing process. This centralization of the process will reduce the fiscal and logistical burdens on towns, as well as provide for a more accurate and secure auditing process.
11. The Secretary recommends that the post-election auditing process be amended to include all ballots that are machine-counted, including those counted centrally.
12. The Secretary recommends that a greater emphasis be placed on ballot security. Ballots should be stored in a secure, locked facility. Additionally, two individuals should always be present whenever these facilities are accessed. This policy should be uniformly followed and enforced.
13. The Secretary recommends that the state join the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), an interstate data consortium that the Pew Center on the States is currently building. This data center would allow participating states to streamline the processes for registering eligible voters; update records of existing voters; and remove duplicate and invalid records from state voter files. The Secretary stresses the need to include multiple agencies in the database, including those that offer public assistance, interact with people with disabilities, and otherwise come into contact with eligible voters who may not normally visit the Department of Motor Vehicles.

*Evaluate ways to integrate technology into our election system.*

14. The Secretary recommends further exploring the use of new technologies in the election process through pilot programs and examination of other states' usage. However, the cost and security of any new technologies should be carefully examined. Examples of new technologies for consideration include:
  - a. Electronic poll books
  - b. More advanced voting systems for the voters with disabilities
  - c. Online voter registration
15. The Secretary recommends immediate implementation of a statewide web-based electronic reporting system for election results.
16. The Secretary recommends the use of web-based training to standardize election staff training across the state.

*Find ways to increase voter participation, particularly among minorities, young people, people with disabilities, and military and overseas voters.*

17. The Secretary recommends Election Day registration in Connecticut and any necessary adjustments to the voter file system to ensure accuracy. Election Day registration has increased voter participation in states where it has been enacted.
18. The Secretary recommends an effort to increase voter participation in Connecticut, with a particular focus on youth, minorities, people with disabilities, and military and overseas voters.



- a. Early voting bears further study as a possible mechanism for reaching minority voters.
  - b. Since the electorate is becoming more mobile, voter registrations should be mobile as well.
  - c. Connecticut's curbside voting program should be better advertised to voters with disabilities, all polling places should be easily handicapped accessible, and poll workers at all locations should be properly trained on utilizing the IVS vote by phone system. A viable, better alternative to the IVS system should also be sought.
  - d. The military and overseas voting process should be amended to allow for the facsimile transmittal of completed absentee ballot applications. The original application would then be returned in the envelope along with the completed absentee ballot via mail, in order for the ballot to be counted.
  - e. The military and overseas voting process should be streamlined by the electronic transmission of printable, mailable ballots. This, along with the above recommendation, would eliminate the mailing time of transmitting completed applications and blank ballots through manual post, and would allow for more time for participation by military and overseas voters.
  - f. The electronic transmission of ballots to military and overseas voters should be further streamlined through the use of the Centralized Voter Registration System.
19. The Secretary recommends that existing voter registration provisions included in legislation such as the National Voter Registration Act be fully enforced. The Secretary further recommends that Connecticut's Department of Corrections be designated as an official voter registration agency.
20. The Secretary recommends a concerted effort to educate the public and the incarcerated population about the voting rights of those detained pre-sentencing and the restoration of voting rights to felons. The Secretary further recommends that the restoration of voting rights be extended to include parolees, as is the case in over a dozen states.
21. The Secretary recommends that Election Day be declared a holiday, as it is in many countries, and/or that elections include in-person voting on a weekend day. This would grant citizens more time to vote and would allow for the use of students and persons with the day off as poll workers.